PRACTICE

Toothbrush vs. Graduation Problem

Curated by Simon De Los Rios

WHO IS THIS FOR

This practice is for anyone treating an ongoing responsibility like a project they should have already finished, such as their health, a relationship, their money, or their inbox.

PAIN

Feeling like a failure every time you fall short of something that was never designed to be finished in the first place.

SOLVES

Helps you label each challenge as something to complete or something to maintain, so you stop judging both by the same standard.

TOPIC

BURNOUT & OVERWHELM | LIFE & MEANING

READ TIME	TIME REQUIRED	WHAT YOU NEED
2 minutes	20 min	notebook, pen

BEFORE YOU START

My invitation, take some time for yourself. Put your phone somewhere else and avoid distractions. Put on music you like and if you feel like it, brew yourself a nice cup of coffee or a tea. And lastly, but most importantly, try to have fun... this must be an activity to be enjoyed.

Step 1: Understand the distinction

Some goals have a finish line, graduation problems: earning a degree, completing a project, learning a skill to a functional level. Others need ongoing care, toothbrush problems: staying fit, maintaining a relationship, practicing gratitude.

– *Which of my current frustrations have I been treating as finishable, when they are ongoing?*

Step 2: List your current challenges

Write down everything weighing on you right now, big or small, in the first column of the table.

WHAT IS WEIGHING ON ME	CIRCLE ONE	FINISH LINE AND DATE, OR SMALLEST DOSE AND TRIGGER
	G T	
	G T	
	G T	
	G T	
	G T	
	G T	

– *What is on this list that I have not looked at directly in a while?*

Step 3: Label each one

Go through your list and circle G for graduation or T for toothbrush.

– *Which item feels different now that I have labeled it, and how?*

– *Which item makes me feel most like I am failing?*

Step 4: Respond to each differently

For each graduation item, write the finish line and a date. For each toothbrush item, write the smallest dose, what triggers it (after coffee, Sunday evening), and what a good-enough week looks like. A toothbrush item gets no end date. Use the last column.

– *What is the smallest version of each toothbrush item that I could keep up on a bad week?*

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS

Pick one toothbrush item and write its smallest dose somewhere you will see it today.

CONTINUE WITH

Keystone Habits, once you know which of your challenges need ongoing care, this practice helps you pick the one small habit to start with.

Curated by: Simon De Los Rios
Source: Adapted from Adam Mastroianni, "So you wanna de-bog yourself" (Experimental History, 2024)